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American Dramatists Series

Told by the Gate

Malcolm Morley



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American Dramatists Series

TOLD BY THE GATE

And Other One-Act Plays

BY
MALCOLM MORLEY



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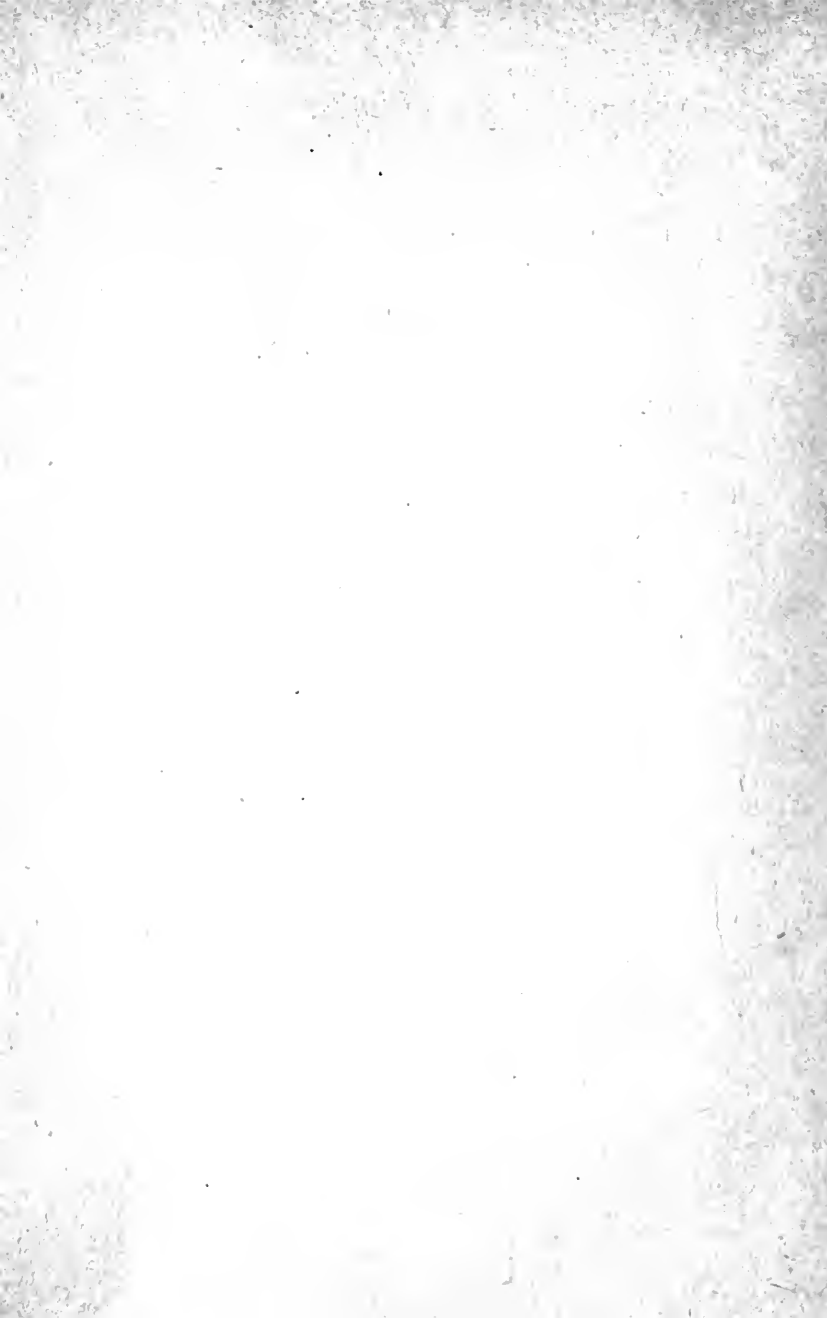
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TOLD BY THE GATE

A love cycle in one act

1914

CHARACTERS

ARTHUR

LEONARD

GERTRUDE

ALICE

SCENE: *A picturesque country meadow. Hedge set across the stage diagonally, upper R. to lower L. A large swinging wooden gate is in the middle of the hedge. A path runs from lower entrance R. up stage, meets gate and extends itself beyond. Trees and foliage in the background.*

PERIOD: *Early Victorian. Costumes, simple and picturesque.*

TOLD BY THE GATE

(Arthur discovered. He is a virile youth with brown hair and a restless manner. He is raising his hat to some one off R.)

ARTHUR. Farewell! *(Stands looking off R.)*

(Enter Gertrude along path behind gate. Arthur turns and they meet, one each side of the gate)

ARTHUR. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. Arthur!

ARTHUR. How do you do?

GERTRUDE. Nicely, I thank you. And you?

ARTHUR. Moderately well. I have been waiting to meet you, Gertrude. I have something to say to you.

GERTRUDE. Yes?

ARTHUR. You will think me presumptuous, I fear.

GERTRUDE. Why should I?

ARTHUR. I must tell you. I can keep silent no longer. Gertrude, I love you.

GERTRUDE. Arthur, you are so impulsive.

ARTHUR. I cannot help it. I have looked into your eyes and they have bewitched me.

GERTRUDE. That sounds as if you were calling me a witch.

ARTHUR. So you are—a beautiful witch.

GERTRUDE. But I thought witches were old and ugly and did all sorts of harm?

ARTHUR. They cast spells and you have cast a spell on me.

GERTRUDE. I was not aware of it. I must remove the spell.

ARTHUR. You cannot.

GERTRUDE. Oh, but if I am a witch, I can remove a spell of my own making.

ARTHUR. I want to remain under the spell—always. Gertrude, tell me, does my love mean anything to you?

GERTRUDE. Of course. Love means everything to a woman.

ARTHUR. You can return my affection?

GERTRUDE. I don't know.

ARTHUR. You don't know?

GERTRUDE. I cannot tell. I love love, I want to be loved and I want to be in love.

ARTHUR. Then I may hope that——

GERTRUDE. Oh, I am not sure whether it is you I want to love me or whether I am in love with you.

ARTHUR. It should be so. Am I not in love with you?

GERTRUDE. You say so.

ARTHUR. I mean so.

GERTRUDE. It requires more than words to express love's meaning.

ARTHUR. Words help and they are all that I can make use of now. Give me other weapons and I'll use them to win you.

GERTRUDE. Why do you wish to win me?

ARTHUR. Because I love you.

GERTRUDE. Why do you love me?

ARTHUR. Because—because—I cannot tell.

GERTRUDE. And I cannot tell whether I love you.

ARTHUR. I love you.

GERTRUDE. Am I the first woman you have ever loved?

ARTHUR. You are the last.

GERTRUDE. And the others?

ARTHUR. They don't count.

GERTRUDE. One day I shall rank with them.

ARTHUR. Never, never—you are the only one to me. I did not love the others nearly so much as I love you. You are above them all. My affection for you is genuine and lasting.

GERTRUDE. Did you make that same speech to the others?

ARTHUR. Er—not exactly.

GERTRUDE. But very like.

ARTHUR. If I did, I did not mean it.

GERTRUDE. Then why did you say it?

ARTHUR. I thought I meant it.

GERTRUDE. As you think you mean it now.

ARTHUR. I do mean it.

GERTRUDE. Arthur, I am afraid you are inconstant.

ARTHUR. Inconstant, never. Besides have you never flirted?

GERTRUDE. Flirtation is the food of love.

ARTHUR. Then flirt with me. I am hungry for love.

GERTRUDE. Don't you think that a man and a maid and an old rustic gate are the first elements of flirtation?

ARTHUR. The gate is between us. It is keeping me from you. It separates us.

GERTRUDE. According to the writers of romance, it should bring us together.

ARTHUR. It should and it does. (*She is leaning over the gate smiling at him. He kisses her. She does not resent it*)

ARTHUR. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. Arthur!

ARTHUR. I love you.

GERTRUDE. And I think I love you.

ARTHUR. You will meet me again by the gate?

GERTRUDE. Yes, indeed.

ARTHUR. I must be going.

GERTRUDE. So soon?

ARTHUR. So soon.

GERTRUDE. Alas!

ARTHUR. Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye. (*He kisses her*)

GERTRUDE. Good-bye, dear one. (*He walks to entrance lower R. then turns to her. She waves handkerchief after him. He exits R. She climbs on gate and sits thinking. Leonard enters from behind hedge L. He is a blonde youth of æsthetic appearance and inclined to be pedantic in his speech.*)

He pushes the gate to and fro, gently swinging Gertrude)

GERTRUDE. Oh—Oh—(*Seeing him*) Leonard—how you frightened me.

LEONARD. May I sit beside you?

GERTRUDE. Yes, if you wish it. (*Leonard sits on gate beside her*)

LEONARD. I offer you my thanks.

GERTRUDE. Isn't it a beautiful day?

LEONARD. Exquisite.

GERTRUDE. The country is so lovely—the air so fresh.

LEONARD. Positively exhilarating.

GERTRUDE. Ah! It is good to be alive.

LEONARD. I agree with you, but there are moments when I do not think so.

GERTRUDE. Whenever may they be?

LEONARD. When I am not near you.

GERTRUDE. You only say that.

LEONARD. Positively I mean it.

GERTRUDE. On a morning like this I should be happy anywhere no matter with whom I was.

LEONARD. Then you are happy with me?

GERTRUDE. Yes.

LEONARD. I am happy with you—exquisitely happy.

GERTRUDE. (*Sighs*) Ah!

LEONARD. (*Sighs*) Ah! (*Leonard descends from gate, takes knife from his pocket and commences to carve on the woodwork*)

GERTRUDE. What are you doing?

LEONARD. Cutting our initials on the gate.

GERTRUDE. There are hundreds of initials there already.

LEONARD. Yes, the gate is old. It has been the meeting place of lovers for many, many years.

GERTRUDE. Here is a heart carved between an M. and a J.

LEONARD. And here is an M linked by a cupid's dart to an S.

GERTRUDE. I wonder if the M stands for the same person in both cases.

LEONARD. Maybe.

GERTRUDE. Then the gate was witness to the two romances.

LEONARD. Presumably.

GERTRUDE. (*Descending from the gate*) Let me see how you are progressing. (*She examines his carving*)

LEONARD. I have nearly finished.

GERTRUDE. Oh, but you are carving a heart around our two initials.

LEONARD. Why not?

GERTRUDE. It hardly seems right. It isn't as though we were betrothed.

LEONARD. This heart has a deep signification. It tells to all who care to observe it that L. loves G.
(*Replacing knife in his pocket*)

GERTRUDE. Yes, but——

LEONARD. That Leonard loves Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. Most likely you will carve other initials the same as M. did. Then the gate will tell how L. loved A. and B. and C. and D. and E.——

LEONARD. No. No. Only G. I love you, Gertrude. Do you love me?

GERTRUDE. Leonard!

LEONARD. (*Kissing her*) What sublime happiness is mine.

GERTRUDE. I must continue on my way.
(*Walking R.*)

LEONARD. (*Following her down*) You will see me again?

GERTRUDE. Yes.

LEONARD. Before long?

GERTRUDE. Yes.

LEONARD. I will wait for you at the gate every day.

GERTRUDE. I will try to come every day. Good-bye.

LEONARD. Good-bye, sweet Gertrude. You take my heart with you. Good-bye. (*Kissing her hand*)

(*Gertrude exits R. Leonard walks slowly back to gate. Alice enters behind hedge and approaches back of gate. She is about to open it when Leonard hurrying forward prevents her*)

LEONARD. You must pay toll, lady, before you pass the gate.

ALICE. But I wish to pass.

LEONARD. Then pay the toll.

ALICE. What is the toll?

LEONARD. A kiss.

ALICE. Oh, but I couldn't.

LEONARD. Then I am afraid you cannot pass.

ALICE. You have no right to prevent me.

LEONARD. You have no right to refuse payment.

ALICE. Please let me pass.

LEONARD. If I allow you to pass will you inform me of your name?

ALICE. Oh, yes.

LEONARD. (*Opening gate and bowing to her as she enters*) Now may I have the privilege of hearing the unknown lady's name?

ALICE. My name is Alice. (*Going R.*)

LEONARD. I thank you. Must you run away like that?

ALICE. Yes. I——

LEONARD. Won't you stay and talk to me?

ALICE. I don't know you. You haven't been introduced to me.

LEONARD. Let me remedy that at once. I will introduce myself. My name is Leonard. Now you know me, may I talk to you?.

ALICE. You are talking to me.

LEONARD. With your permission?

ALICE. It is rather late to ask permission now.

LEONARD. You object?

ALICE. I didn't say so.

LEONARD. I trust not. I want us to be friends.

ALICE. Perhaps we shall be.

LEONARD. Very good friends?

ALICE. I cannot say. I haven't known you long enough for that.

LEONARD. That is the reason we should see a great deal of one another.

ALICE. Why?

LEONARD. So that you may decide soon whether we are to be very good friends or no.

ALICE. Why are you so anxious for us to be such friends?

LEONARD. Because I admire your ways. I like your sweet voice, I love your glorious hair and I adore your beautiful blue eyes.

ALICE. I have several very good friends, but none of them talk like that.

LEONARD. Then I shall be a particular "very good friend." When may I see you again?

ALICE. Oh, I could not think of making an appointment with you.

LEONARD. Misery is mine.

ALICE. (*Going up to gate*) But I pass through this gate every day about this time.

LEONARD. Joy comes to me.

ALICE. I love this old gate.

LEONARD. I also.

ALICE. It is so quaint.

LEONARD. Exceedingly.

ALICE. It must be very ancient. Look at all the initials carved upon it. Some so old and some quite recent.

LEONARD. (*Hastily standing before the place he has recently carved*) Yes. Yes.

ALICE. How many lovers must have met here!

LEONARD. Do you wonder at it? A man and a maid would say more to one another by this old gate than anywhere else. This is the path of romance and this the gateway to love.

ALICE. What pretty things you say.

LEONARD. (*Looking steadfastly at her*) I see them all in your eyes.

ALICE. My eyes?

LEONARD. Yes, those beautiful eyes are telling me wonderful things.

ALICE. What do they tell you?

LEONARD. They tell me that I may love you.

ALICE. No.

LEONARD. Your lips say no, but your eyes say yes.

ALICE. My eyes must be very forward.

LEONARD. Only truthful; let your lips be the same.

ALICE. My lips should be sealed.

LEONARD. Then I will seal them. (*Kisses her*)

ALICE. You shouldn't.

LEONARD. Why not, pretty Alice?

ALICE. You have forced my lips to agree with my eyes.

LEONARD. An agreement of which I fully approve.

ALICE. Leonard!

LEONARD. I must go now, Alice. Farewell, and may our next meeting be soon. (*Opens gate and passes through*)

ALICE. I hope so. (*He leans over gate, takes off his hat and kisses her behind it*)

LEONARD. Till we meet again.

ALICE. Good-bye. (*Leonard exits upper entrance L. behind hedge. Alice looks after him, leaning upon gate. Arthur enters lower entrance R. and comes up behind her*)

ARTHUR. Is it possible? Alice!

ALICE. (*Turning*) Arthur!

ARTHUR. What a lucky accident! I am ever so pleased to meet you again.

ALICE. The last time we met here, you did not seem very pleased.

ARTHUR. I cannot be anything else but pleased when I see you.

ALICE. You spoke horridly to me.

ARTHUR. I was jealous—that's all.

ALICE. Indeed!

ARTHUR. I love you so well I cannot help being jealous.

ALICE. I don't understand why you should be jealous.

ARTHUR. You had been speaking to another man.

ALICE. Suppose I had?

ARTHUR. He had been making love to you.

ALICE. Am I to blame for that?

ARTHUR. You listened to him.

ALICE. Could I help it?

ARTHUR. Yes, you could have refused to listen.

ALICE. I think you are very impertinent.

ARTHUR. Forgive me, Alice, but I love you.

ALICE. I should hardly have thought so from your behaviour.

ARTHUR. Forgive me, dearest, forgive me.

ALICE. Why is it we always quarrel by this gate?

ARTHUR. Maybe it is because when standing by this old wooden frame I become acutely aware of my affection for you. I can think of nothing else and am so afraid of losing you.

ALICE. The gate has heard so many of our tiffs.

ARTHUR. And many other lovers' tiffs and reconciliations too.

ALICE. If the gate could only speak!

ARTHUR. What stories it could relate.

ALICE. I think it just as well it cannot talk.

ARTHUR. Perhaps it is.

ALICE. The dear old gate!

ARTHUR. Tell me, how long have you been here?

ALICE. Oh, quite a long time.

ARTHUR. Alone?

ALICE. No.

ARTHUR. Who was with you?

ALICE. Oh,—a stranger.

ARTHUR. A man?

ALICE. Er—Er—Yes.

ARTHUR. I knew it.

ALICE. Then why ask me?

ARTHUR. Did he make love to you?

ALICE. I refuse to answer when you speak like that.

ARTHUR. He did. I know he did.

ALICE. Please keep your temper.

ARTHUR. Keep my temper—Bah! (*Laughs wildly*)

ALICE. Control your feelings.

ARTHUR. One should have no feelings where women are concerned. They are all fickle, as false as can be.

ALICE. How differently he spoke to me.

ARTHUR. You can go to him. Let him tell you his tale of love—pretend you have always been heart free—that no other man has kissed you—deceive him as you have deceived me. He will believe you. The gate will be the only witness of your perfidy.

ALICE. Arthur, I'll not listen to you. I am going. From this moment everything is over between us.

ARTHUR. Everything is. I'll not speak to an-

other woman as long as I live. Yes, I will though. Why shouldn't I? I will make love to the first one that comes along. She will listen to me, the same as you did once, and then I'll make love to another and another. I'll be as fickle as you.

ALICE. I hate you, Arthur.

ARTHUR. And I ha— No, I loved you once. I cannot hate you. I am just indifferent. I am waiting for another girl to come along. (*Alice stamps her foot indignantly at him and exits lower entrance R.*)

ARTHUR. Farewell! (*Stands looking after her*)

(*Enter Gertrude along path behind gate. Arthur turns and they meet, one each side of the gate. The dialogue and business are now exactly the same as at the opening of the play*)

ARTHUR. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. Arthur!

ARTHUR. How do you do?

GERTRUDE. Nicely, I thank you. And you?

ARTHUR. Moderately well. I have been waiting to meet you, Gertrude. I have something to say to you.

GERTRUDE. Yes?

ARTHUR. You will think me presumptuous, I fear.

GERTRUDE. Why should I?

ARTHUR. I must tell you. I can keep silent no longer. Gertrude, I love you.

(Quick Curtain)

THE MASTERPIECE

A Play in One Act

1914

CHARACTERS

MAURICE

ÉMILE

PAULETTE

HÉLÈNE

SCENE: *The Apartment of Maurice in the Montmartre, Paris. Doors R. and L. Window C. Fireplace R. Table, chairs, etc.*

THE MASTERPIECE

(Maurice is discovered seated at table with writing materials before him. He reads over something he has written, is dissatisfied and tears it up. He rises and walks up and down the room trying to compose sentences. He sits again, picks up a pen and writes a few phrases. Once more he expresses dissatisfaction and tears up what he has written.)

Enter Paulette L. She goes up behind him and places her arms around his neck)

PAULETTE. My poor boy, you are worried.

MAURICE. The phrases will not come. The words elude me.

PAULETTE. Patience, Maurice, patience.

MAURICE. Patience never helped me yet. That is only for commonplace writers. It is inspiration I want.

PAULETTE. It will come.

MAURICE. Paulette, I am going to write a masterpiece, do you hear, a masterpiece!

PAULETTE. I am sure of it.

MAURICE. My new book will be the talk of Paris, of France, of the entire world.

PAULETTE. How proud I shall be of my lover.

MAURICE. But I cannot commence until the moment of inspiration. I must have inspiration.

PAULETTE. If only I could inspire you!

MAURICE. You cannot. You did once, but this is different. When I wrote "The Victory of Love," your influence was essential. You loved me and were near me. Your presence alone enabled me to write of the joy and happiness of true love. If only I could write with the same facility now!

PAULETTE. Why should it be different?

MAURICE. Because the subject is different. The hero of my new story is an unavailing lover. He loves but is not loved. What inspiration can you give me when you love me? If only you did not.

PAULETTE. What then?

MAURICE. Then my emotions, my feelings, would be the same as those of my hero. I could describe the futility of his passion, the hopelessness of his affection. My despair would be his. My thoughts would be his and thus I could write of his despondency and his misery.

PAULETTE. But, Maurice, cannot you imagine all of that?

MAURICE. No. I must live it. It is the only way to produce my masterpiece.

PAULETTE. How can you live it?

MAURICE. I must, somehow. Paulette, you must hate me—you must resist me—spurn me—never allow me to come near you.

PAULETTE. Oh, Maurice, I couldn't.

MAURICE. You couldn't?

PAULETTE. No, indeed.

MAURICE. Then you don't love me.

PAULETTE. You know I do.

MAURICE. If you loved me, you would hate me when I asked you.

PAULETTE. I could only pretend, and I am afraid that would not be much good, as all the time we should know we really loved each other.

MAURICE. Yes, pretence is no good. It must be the genuine thing with me. My emotions must be real, vividly real.

PAULETTE. How can you force them to be different from what they are?

MAURICE. That is easy if one places one's work first. Listen, Paulette. I must have a hopeless passion. You and I can no longer be together—we must forget each other—until my book is completed, my masterpiece written.

PAULETTE. Oh, Maurice!

MAURICE. I must make unavailing love to some one. It is absolutely necessary.

PAULETTE. But—but—Oh, you can't mean it.
(*Half crying*)

MAURICE. I certainly do. Come, come, Paulette, why should you mind? It is for the sake of my masterpiece. When that is finished, we can come together again. Our love will be all the more glorious because of the sacrifice it has made for art.

PAULETTE. You are cruel.

MAURICE. It is you who will be cruel, if you hinder me from writing my masterpiece. Let us forget each other until that is written. Remember, I am not going to be untrue to you. It is unsuccessful love that I intend to experience.

PAULETTE. (*Drying her eyes*) Whom are you going to make love to?

MAURICE. That's a question. It must be some one who cannot love me. Is there anybody, I wonder?

PAULETTE. Don't take any risks.

MAURICE. If I make my advances to a girl who has already formed an attachment, I ought to succeed in not succeeding.

PAULETTE. There is Hélène. She and Émile are devoted to one another. You would stand no chance with her. Besides, she has often asked me how I manage to endure you.

MAURICE. (*Petulantly*) Indeed!

PAULETTE. She will be sure to reject you.

MAURICE. God bless her!

PAULETTE. And as I interfere with the composition of your masterpiece, I—I'll pack my things together and—and leave you. (*Crosses to door L.*)

MAURICE. God bless you!

PAULETTE. Since you wish it, all is over between us.

MAURICE. Until my work is completed. Do not forget that my love for you is lying dormant and when the book is finished will revive a thousand-fold.

PAULETTE. Suppose the book is never written?

MAURICE. (*Emphatically*) It shall be. Hélène will give me inspiration.

PAULETTE. Oh!—I hope so. (*Exit Paulette L.*)

(*Maurice paces slowly backwards and forwards. He observes picture of Paulette on the mantelshelf R. He takes it down regretfully and places it in drawer of table L. C. On looking up he sees another picture of her on the table. This he also intends to place away in the drawer, but before doing so raises it to his lips*)

(*Émile and Hélène enter door R. abruptly*)

ÉMILE. Maurice! Maurice!

MAURICE. (*Putting down picture*) Who's there?

ÉMILE. We are.

MAURICE. (*Turning to them*) Émile, and you, too, Hélène. (*Shaking hands with them*) Delighted to see you both.

ÉMILE. Have you heard the news?

MAURICE. What news?

HÉLÈNE. Jean Ladureau has sold a painting for a thousand francs. He is celebrating his good fortune at "Le Chat Noir" and wants us all to join him.

MAURICE. Good!

HÉLÈNE. Hurrah for Jean. May he sell many more pictures!

ÉMILE. Where's Paulette?

MAURICE. In the next room. I'll go and tell her. (*Exit Maurice L.*)

HÉLÈNE. How attached Maurice is to Paulette. (*Picking up picture*) See, here is her picture. He was actually kissing it when we came in, and she only in the next room.

ÉMILE. Paulette is equally as devoted to him.

HÉLÈNE. He is a great artiste and loves as only a great artiste can love.

ÉMILE. Meaning that I, being nothing but a reporter, cannot love.

HÉLÈNE. I did not say that. Maurice has wonderful thoughts and ideas. His love must be wonderful, too, and as fanciful as his writings, whereas yours is——

ÉMILE. Yes, mine is——?

HÉLÈNE. Well—just ordinary and commonplace.

ÉMILE. Hélène, you are trying to pick another one of your quarrels. Why, I have often heard you ask Paulette how she ever managed to endure Maurice.

HÉLÈNE. Oh, yes, that is a question I ask every girl concerning her lover.

ÉMILE. It is remarkable that you endure me, seeing that my love is so commonplace.

HÉLÈNE. What can't be cured must be endured.

ÉMILE. You are irritating. I have a good mind to break with you—to finish our “ordinary and commonplace” romance.

HÉLÈNE. Do, if it pleases you, but you will find that I have only to beckon and you will come back to me.

ÉMILE. Never. Let me tell you something. If Paulette were not with Maurice she would be with me. I loved her more than ever I loved you.

HÉLÈNE. Maurice won her. I am not surprised at that, considering the difference between the two of you.

ÉMILE. He won her because he wrote poetry. He would write sonnets to her eyes, her hair and her teeth. Bah—what is a poet? A man who degrades beautiful thoughts by bringing them to the dull drab level of words.

HÉLÈNE. You are jealous of him.

ÉMILE. What became of his poetry when he found he could not live by it? Without a regret he abandoned it and took to prose. He writes tender love stories. Who reads them? Nobody except a few fat sentimental old women.

HÉLÈNE. Émile, you are unjust. He is a great author and will one day be acclaimed so. As for Paulette, she doesn't deserve to be loved by so wonderful a man.

(Enter Paulette and Maurice L.)

PAULETTE. Monsieur Émile. Hélène.

HÉLÈNE. *(Crossing to Paulette)* Paulette, my sweet child, how are you? You look pale.

PAULETTE. It is nothing.

HÉLÈNE. Surely you have been crying. I feel so concerned about you, darling.

PAULETTE. You are very kind, but really, it is nothing.

ÉMILE. Come, let us join Jean. It is not often that he sells a picture.

PAULETTE. Yes, let us go.

ÉMILE. Come, then, to "Le Chat Noir."

ALL. To "Le Chat Noir."

ÉMILE. Take my arm, Mademoiselle Paulette.

PAULETTE. With pleasure, Monsieur. (*Émile and Paulette exit R.*)

(*Throughout the following scene it is apparent that Maurice is acting a part*)

HÉLÈNE. (*At door R., to Maurice*) Are you coming?

MAURICE. Grant me a favour. Remain behind a short while. I wish to speak to you.

HÉLÈNE. Certainly.

MAURICE. I have news that may surprise you.

HÉLÈNE. What is it?

MAURICE. Paulette and I are parting.

HÉLÈNE. You are? But I thought——

MAURICE. You thought that I loved her. I thought so myself once, but it was a mistake.

HÉLÈNE. You love some one else?

MAURICE. Alas, yes.

HÉLÈNE. And this some one is taking Paulette's place?

MAURICE. Alas, no.

HÉLÈNE. But you hope to win her?

MAURICE. That is impossible.

HÉLÈNE. Nothing should be impossible to you who write such beautiful books.

MAURICE. I am consumed with a hopeless passion. The fire of love has entered my heart. It is burning me but I cannot quench it. It will leave me a smouldering cinder on the path of life.

HÉLÈNE. How poetic!

MAURICE. She has entered my life and taken entire possession of my thoughts. Not a minute of the day passes but what I think of her, one moment deluding myself with pictures of the happiness that would come to me were she mine, the next moment realising the sheer impossibility of such a thing.

HÉLÈNE. But why impossible?

MAURICE. She belongs to another.

HÉLÈNE. Have you told her that you love her?

MAURICE. What is the use? My pleadings would be without avail, my words would fall upon ears unattuned to them.

HÉLÈNE. Why not put it to the test?

MAURICE. I dare not. I know the answer too well. Her face is turned from me. Never, never, will it be inclined in my direction. No, I must accept my fate, that of a despairing, unavailing lover.

HÉLÈNE. Who is the lady who has inspired such a grand passion in you?

MAURICE. I tremble to tell you.

HÉLÈNE. You may have every confidence in me. I will never betray your secret.

MAURICE. If I told you I should incur your eternal displeasure.

HÉLÈNE. How can that be?

MAURICE. It can be, because the lady is——
No, no. I dare not say it.

HÉLÈNE. Please tell me. Since you have told me so much, I shall be mortified if you do not tell me who she is. You know you may trust me to say nothing.

MAURICE. (*Falling on his knees before her*)
Hélène, it is you. Do you understand now why I am unhappy? You love Émile, you belong to him. My love must be forever unrequited.

HÉLÈNE. You love me?

MAURICE. Alas! Alas! Alas!

HÉLÈNE. Maurice! How beautiful!

MAURICE. But I am spurned and despised. How miserable I am!

HÉLÈNE. Do not be miserable.

MAURICE. I love you. I cannot help loving you. My soul cries out for you. Its cry is unheeded. It

calls in vain. Oh, the torture of a hopeless passion! Other men have their loves, but I am doomed to be alone—a pariah, an outcast fated to leave untouched the rapturous delights of love.

HÉLÈNE. How poetic!

MAURICE. But I can still worship you from the distance. You are like the sun above me, miles and miles away, but you cannot prevent a solitary ray of light from penetrating the darkness of my lonely cell.

HÉLÈNE. Maurice, your cell need not be lonely.

MAURICE. You mean Paulette will be with me. No, she can stay with me no longer. I do not love her. It is you I want, Hélène.

HÉLÈNE. You really want me?

MAURICE. Madly. But why have I told you? How you must hate me.

HÉLÈNE. I do not hate you.

MAURICE. No?

HÉLÈNE. I love you, Maurice. I am all yours.

MAURICE. (*Intensely surprised*) What?

HÉLÈNE. I always preferred you to Émile. I never suspected your feelings towards me. I have always wanted you to love me, and now I give myself to you.

MAURICE. I—I am overwhelmed. (*Rising*)

HÉLÈNE. With joy. Naturally, you are, dear heart.

MAURICE. I thought you would refuse me.

HÉLÈNE. You imagined I was devoted to Émile.

MAURICE. Yes.

HÉLÈNE. He and I can never agree. We are always quarreling. I have been thinking of leaving him for some time and now that I know you love me, everything is changed for me.

MAURICE. And for me, too.

HÉLÈNE. What bliss will be ours!

MAURICE. Yes, but——

HÉLÈNE. But what, dearest?

MAURICE. My masterpiece.

HÉLÈNE. Your masterpiece?

MAURICE. I cannot write it now.

HÉLÈNE. It shall be a masterpiece of masterpieces. I will inspire you to write it.

MAURICE. That is just what you cannot do.

HÉLÈNE. Surely my love must help you?

MAURICE. You do not understand. To help me with my masterpiece, you should not have listened to my love-making. You have spoilt everything by saying "Yes."

HÉLÈNE. I don't understand.

MAURICE. It is simple enough. I was trying to experience the emotions that I want my hero to go through. He is to make love and be refused. You have upset my arrangement by accepting me.

HÉLÈNE. You mean that all those poetic speeches were meant for a book; that you do not love me?

MAURICE. Not now that you have listened to my pleadings.

HÉLÈNE. You are a horrid, wicked deceiver. You tell me you love me, and all the time you do not love me.

MAURICE. It is my work that I love. All my real feelings and emotions have to be sacrificed for the sake of my art. It is my method and the results should be worth it. In order to make my masterpiece realistic, I have to live the life of my hero.

HÉLÈNE. Then you intended me to be the means to an end.

MAURICE. Forgive me, Hélène, forgive me.

HÉLÈNE. Never, never, I hate you, I hate Émile, I hate all men.

(*Enter Paulette R.*)

PAULETTE. Aren't you coming over? We are waiting for you.

HÉLÈNE. Do not include me in the party. I shall not be there.

PAULETTE. Why, what is the matter, Hélène?

HÉLÈNE. Oh, nothing. Maurice has been making love to me, that's all.

PAULETTE. And Émile has been making love to me. Aren't men fickle creatures?

HÉLÈNE. I'll never listen to another as long as I live. (*Exit Hélène R.*)

PAULETTE. She seems upset. I knew she would refuse you, but I did not think she would be so indignant.

MAURICE. She didn't refuse me.

PAULETTE. No?

MAURICE. Consequently I had to tell her that she had placed me in a false position.

PAULETTE. You mean you had placed her in a false position.

MAURICE. It's all the same.

PAULETTE. No wonder she was indignant. I should have been the same myself. She resented being picked up and let fall according to the vagaries of the artistic temperament.

MAURICE. Tell me, Paulette, is it true that Émile has been making love to you? (*Paulette assents*) How dare he? He knows that you belong to me.

PAULINE. I told him that our Romance was finished.

MAURICE. What about Hélène?

PAULETTE. I also told him that you were probably making love to her.

MAURICE. Paulette, you know that you are the only girl that I can ever have any real affection for.

PAULETTE. Is your affection ever real?

MAURICE. You know it is. Look at the happy times we have had together.

PAULETTE. Yes, but they are ended now, and Émile says my happy times in future will be with him.

MAURICE. (*Incredulously*) Paulette, you do not intend to leave me?

PAULETTE. My dear boy, I have already left you. We arranged all that a short time ago.

MAURICE. You can't mean it?

PAULETTE. I do.

MAURICE. But what am I to do without you?

PAULETTE. What you please; study your emotions, continue with your writing; perhaps you will be famous one day.

MAURICE. Listen, Paulette, I love you. I always have loved you and always will. Do not be so cruel as to leave me! I entreat you to remain with me. I can't live without you! If you desert me the sunshine will disappear from my life and all will be dark.

PAULETTE. You told me to go.

MAURICE. Forget my words. Forgive me and come back to me. I love you, Paulette, I love you.

PAULETTE. I loved you, too, once; but after your words this morning, that love has died. I do not wish to listen to you any longer.

MAURICE. Paulette!

PAULETTE. (*Crossing to door R.*) Good-bye.

MAURICE. Do not go out of my life!

PAULETTE. Good-bye.

MAURICE. Shall I never see you again?

PAULETTE. Never——

MAURICE. Ah!

PAULETTE. Until the masterpiece is written.

MAURICE. The masterpiece?

PAULETTE. Yes. Farewell. (*Exit Paulette R.*)

(*Maurice looks after her, thinking deeply. It dawns upon him that he has undergone the experience he wished for and that he can now proceed with his work. He sits at the table, picks up a pen and slowly commences to write. He becomes more and more absorbed in his work and is writing rapidly when the curtain descends.*)



RECOLLECTIONS

A Matrimonial Duologue

1913

CHARACTERS

GEORGE TRAVERS

MURIEL TRAVERS

SCENE: *Sitting Room in the Travers' flat at Kensington. Doors R. and C. Fireplace L. Appropriate furniture. Time, 8 o'clock in the evening.*

RECOLLECTIONS

(Enter George, C., in evening dress. He slowly takes off hat and coat, sits near fireplace, and gives vent to an expressive "Damn!" He takes letter out of his pocket and reads it, tears it into small pieces and throws it into the fire. He watches the pieces as they burn. Enter Muriel, R., in evening gown and opera cloak. She utters an exclamation of surprise as she sees George.)

MURIEL. George! You at home!

GEORGE. Why shouldn't I be?

MURIEL. It is so unusual for you to be here in the evening.

GEORGE. The unusual is not always the impossible.

MURIEL. You are generally at your club—or somewhere. It is such a surprise to find you at home.

GEORGE. There are more surprises in married life than are dreamt of in woman's philosophy.

MURIEL. From the hurried manner in which you changed and rushed out of the house two hours ago, I presumed you had an appointment for dinner.

GEORGE. I understood so myself, but the understanding was a misunderstanding.

MURIEL. You haven't dined? Poor dear, how cross you must be.

GEORGE. I'm no different from usual.

MURIEL. I didn't say you were.

GEORGE. Besides, I have dined.

MURIEL. Then why complain? Where's the misunderstanding?

GEORGE. I had an appointment to dine with a friend at Romano's. There was a letter for me at the restaurant saying that it was all off. So I was left to my own resources.

MURIEL. With no pretty lady to make love to.

GEORGE. I didn't say my appointment was with a lady.

MURIEL. Your air of abject dejection at her non-appearance infers it, however.

GEORGE. Well, my friends are my own.

MURIEL. Even if they don't keep appointments.

GEORGE. I went on to the club hoping to meet some of the fellows there, but they were all out of town, so I dined alone in solitary state.

MURIEL. Good company, if not particularly brilliant.

GEORGE. It wasn't good enough for me, so I returned home to enjoy the society of my wife.

MURIEL. Your wife is very sorry that she cannot be a makeshift, much as she would like to be. The fact is, she has an engagement which she must fulfil. Besides, it is too absurd.

GEORGE. What?

MURIEL. For a husband to pretend he enjoys his wife's society after seven years of married life.

GEORGE. Where are you going?

MURIEL. To keep an appointment.

GEORGE. With whom?

MURIEL. Your interest flatters me. With an acquaintance.

GEORGE. A man or a woman?

MURIEL. Curious—eh?

GEORGE. Oh, no, not at all. Don't tell me, if you don't want to.

MURIEL. I don't.

GEORGE. Of course your friends are your own, and it's no business of mine. My friends are my own and——

MURIEL. It's no business of mine.

GEORGE. Exactly.

MURIEL. How perfectly we agree.

(He lights cigarette. She stands by mirror arranging her cloak, etc.)

GEORGE. What time is your appointment?

MURIEL. Eight o'clock.

GEORGE. You'll be late. It's a quarter past now.

MURIEL. Oh, he can wait.

GEORGE. He?

MURIEL. Yes, it is a he—Henry Curtis. He is taking me to the first night at the Majestic.

GEORGE. That idiot.

MURIEL. Is it necessary for me to hear my friends insulted?

GEORGE. That man your friend.

MURIEL. Why not? He has been very attentive to me lately. Yesterday he escorted me to the Fine Arts Ball, and last Friday we went together to the Opera.

GEORGE. That man is absolutely void of common sense.

MURIEL. I think that's what makes him so interesting.

GEORGE. You think so?

MURIEL. Yes. People gifted with common sense are generally very tedious.

GEORGE. Well, don't let me keep you from him.

MURIEL. You're not. I want him to wait for me. It does him good to wait, and he appreciates me all the more when I do arrive.

GEORGE. You're just the same Muriel. You used to keep me waiting in the same fashion.

MURIEL. I'm sure I never did.

GEORGE. I have recollections of waiting hours at stations and restaurants for you.

MURIEL. That was your own fault—you were always hours too early.

GEORGE. Oh, come now, you must admit there were occasions when you were behind time.

MURIEL. They were very few, then, and I was never more than five minutes late.

GEORGE. Why, I remember waiting for you one time at Victoria from three till half past four.

MURIEL. That wasn't my fault. I couldn't travel by the train I intended to because father happened to be going up to town that day. Remember, he objected very strongly to our meetings. Why, he would have had a fit had he known that I went all the way from Sutton to town just to take tea with you.

GEORGE. (*Throwing away his cigarette and*

speaking enthusiastically) Yes, I remember seeing the train in and meeting the old boy. He seemed surprised to see me. He little knew I had a rendezvous with his daughter.

MURIEL. I came on by the next train, and, going back, took the one just before father. He doesn't know to this day about that meeting.

GEORGE. That wasn't the only occasion when we hoaxed him.

MURIEL. No—there was that time when he and I drove over to Croydon. You followed the trap on your bicycle.

GEORGE. Yes, I kept you in sight all the way. He had no suspicion I was behind.

MURIEL. Then he told me to drive home alone, as he had business in Croydon——

GEORGE. And you drove home, but not alone.

MURIEL. (*Laughing*) It didn't take you long to dispose of your bicycle and to be sitting beside me in the trap.

GEORGE. What a glorious afternoon that was!

MURIEL. We were happy enough then.

GEORGE. We were.

MURIEL. Although I remember you said you would never be happy until we were man and wife.

GEORGE. Did I?

MURIEL. You did, and you were tremendously emphatic about it.

GEORGE. And you said, too, that you would never be really happy until we were married.

MURIEL. I said that?

GEORGE. Yes, I know I kissed you over and over again for saying it.

MURIEL. And now we are married.

GEORGE. Yes.

MURIEL. How happy we must be.

GEORGE. You say that as if we weren't happy now.

MURIEL. But we are, if our own prophecies are to be believed.

GEORGE. Perfect happiness does not belong to the present tense; it is either past or future.

MURIEL. And ours belonged to the future, but now belongs to the past.

GEORGE. You seem to be enjoying the present, however. You have plenty of distractions, to say nothing of that idiot of a Curtis to make love to you.

MURIEL. He doesn't make love to me. Our relations are everything they should be.

GEORGE. Oh, I don't doubt it is an innocent flirtation, if flirtations are ever innocent.

MURIEL. What a thing to accuse me of! Why, I never flirt.

GEORGE. You always were a flirt, Muriel. I remember on your mother's At-Home days you flirted with every man who called.

MURIEL. Oh, no!—not every one.

GEORGE. Well, all who were worth flirting with.

MURIEL. That's more like it, and don't forget, you were one of the favoured few.

GEORGE. Yes, and how jealous I was of the others.

MURIEL. Oh, but they didn't seriously count with me.

GEORGE. I wasn't able to tell that until I——

MURIEL. Until you were silly enough to propose and I was silly enough to accept you.

GEORGE. Do you remember that day, Muriel?

MURIEL. Do I remember? A woman always remembers her first three proposals, and yours was only my second.

GEORGE. It was my very first.

MURIEL. That sounds as if you had made a good many since.

GEORGE. I should have said, you are the only woman I ever proposed to.

MURIEL. That accounts for the terrible mess you made of it.

GEORGE. I say, now, I flatter myself I did it very neatly.

MURIEL. (*Laughs*)

GEORGE. That amuses you.

MURIEL. Oh, George, if only you could have seen how ridiculous you looked.

GEORGE. Ridiculous?

MURIEL. Yes, you hemmed and hawed and spluttered until I was really afraid you would never get it out.

GEORGE. Afraid?

MURIEL. Well, of course I wanted you to finish, once you had started.

GEORGE. I came to the point in a straightforward, manly way.

MURIEL. (*Laughing*) Oh, you came to the point all right, but you stopped once or twice on the way.

GEORGE. I suppose you were as much amused then as you are now.

MURIEL. (*Changing her tone*) No, indeed; that was the greatest moment of my life. I wish I could live it all over again.

GEORGE. You do?

MURIEL. Yes.

GEORGE. Then, by Jove, you shall. I'll propose to you again.

MURIEL. Exactly as you did seven years ago?

GEORGE. Exactly.

MURIEL. Can you remember what you said?

GEORGE. I ought to be able to. I practised it long enough beforehand.

MURIEL. (*Taking off her cloak*) Then we'll go over the scene just as it happened seven years ago.

GEORGE. Your father was out when I called at the house and you were in the drawing room, I think.

MURIEL. Yes, seated on the sofa, reading a book.

GEORGE. Were you reading?

MURIEL. I recollect distinctly. I knew your knock and did not want you to find me unoccupied. (*Picking up book and sitting on sofa R.*) Here I am on the sofa. You are outside in the hall.

GEORGE. Right. (*Goes outside door C.*)

MURIEL. Now for the momentous occasion.

GEORGE. (*From outside*) Are you ready?

MURIEL. Yes.

(*George enters briskly and speaks in a matter-of-fact way*)

GEORGE. Good afternoon, Muriel. How do you do. Charming day to-day.

MURIEL. (*Laughing*) Not a bit like it.

GEORGE. No?

MURIEL. You didn't come into the room like that. Why that is your best solicitor's manner, and I never had enough faith in you to become your client. You came in very quietly, and you didn't talk about the weather.

GEORGE. Oh—Well, I'll try again. (*Goes up to door C.*)

MURIEL. I don't believe you remember anything about it.

GEORGE. I do. You'll see this time. (*George goes outside door. He re-enters, opening the door cautiously, and creeps down to back of sofa where Muriel is sitting, pretending to read. He places his hand over her eyes*)

MURIEL. Who is it? (*Releasing herself and rising*) Hullo, George.

GEORGE. Hullo, Muriel. I knew the old man was going to be away, so I came down especially to see you. (*He shakes hands with her. They smile at each other*)

MURIEL. How nice of you.

GEORGE. I've brought you these. I hope you'll like them. (*Produces imaginary parcel and hands it to her*)

MURIEL. Thank you. (*Resumes seat on sofa and opens the parcel in pantomime*) Oh, what a lovely box of chocolates!

GEORGE. I wonder what I said next.

MURIEL. You didn't say anything. You were too busy helping me to eat the chocolates.

GEORGE. So I was. (*They both pretend to be busy eating chocolates*)

MURIEL. Go on with your proposal.

GEORGE. (*Pretending to be nervous and speaking very slowly*) Muriel, I want to ask you something—you must know what it is. You cannot fail to have observed that I—that I——

MURIEL. Oh—Oh——

GEORGE. What's the matter?

MURIEL. This is a ginger one. I don't like ginger. You have it. (*Places imaginary chocolate which she has bitten into George's mouth*)

GEORGE. You cannot fail to have observed that——

MURIEL. That you have your mouth full and it is utter bad form to make love with your mouth

full of chocolate and ginger.

GEORGE. (*Hastily swallows what is supposed to be in his mouth*) There, it's gone, and now it isn't bad form for me to make love. (*Approaches her and takes her by the hands*) You cannot fail to——

MURIEL. Oh, there—you've upset the box. How clumsy you are. Please pick them up. (*He picks up the chocolates one by one and places them in the box, which he returns to her*)

MURIEL. Thank you.

GEORGE. You cannot fail to have observed that I——

MURIEL. If you say that again I shall scream.

GEORGE. Muriel.

MURIEL. If you want to ask me to marry you, do it in a natural manner. Don't stand there telling me that I cannot fail to have observed, just as if I were the heroine in a cheap novel.

GEORGE. Make fun of me if you like, but I'm serious. (*Speaking deliberately*) Will you be my wife?

MURIEL. (*Imitating his tone; rising*) Will you be less theatrical?

GEORGE. (*Taking her in his arms and speaking ardently*) Look here, Muriel, you have just got to be. Do you understand? You've got to marry

me.

MURIEL. Well, of course, if you insist.

GEORGE. I do.

MURIEL. Then I suppose I must.

GEORGE. (*Rapturously*) Muriel.

MURIEL. (*Returning abruptly to present time*)
Splendid, but you forgot to kiss me.

GEORGE. So I did—there. (*Kisses her*)

MURIEL. Oh, but you didn't give me a peck like that.

GEORGE. (*Holds her in his arms and gives her a long kiss*) Is that it?

MURIEL. That's better.

GEORGE. And then we had to break the news to your father.

MURIEL. Poor Papa. He never seemed to take to you. He said you were a perfect fool.

GEORGE. Oh, did he?

MURIEL. And I used to tell him that a perfect fool might make a perfect husband, but an imperfect fool—never.

GEORGE. Anyhow, you managed to make him consent to our engagement.

MURIEL. Yes, after he had raved and carried on,

abusing everybody and everything. It was only when he saw how determined I was to marry you that he gave in.

GEORGE. I was equally determined to marry you.

MURIEL. Yes, we meant to have our own way in that small matter.

GEORGE. How absorbed we were in each other.

MURIEL. Now we don't seem at all indispensable to each other.

GEORGE. You have Henry Curtis to interest you!

MURIEL. And you have an unknown lady with whom you dine at Romano's.

GEORGE. Oh, she doesn't count. I don't really care a rap for her. She is only a distraction.

MURIEL. I can't even call Henry Curtis that. He is so senseless.

GEORGE. Then why go with him to-night?

MURIEL. I don't intend to.

GEORGE. What are you going to do?

MURIEL. Stay at home with you.

GEORGE. What about your appointment?

MURIEL. I've finished with him. You can be much more entertaining—especially when you rehearse love scenes.

GEORGE. Can't we make those rehearsals real?

MURIEL. George, you forget that we have been married seven years.

GEORGE. And we should be nearer and closer to each other, instead of drifting apart as we are doing.

MURIEL. What about the unknown lady?

GEORGE. She always came a long way after you, but now I give her up completely.

MURIEL. (*Going to him and speaking quietly*) George, I don't think our married life has been all we intended it to be.

GEORGE. It's my fault. I've neglected you.

MURIEL. And my fault, too. I've been indifferent and allowed other men to flirt with me.

GEORGE. Let's begin again. Let us go back to the first few months after our wedding.

MURIEL. Yes. We won't allow our affection to simmer any more.

GEORGE. Do you remember, I used to sit in this chair? (*Sits in chair near fire*)

MURIEL. Yes. (*She goes to lamp on table and turns it out*) The light would be out and I would sit beside you with my head on your shoulder. (*Seats herself so. The light from the fire falls upon their figures*)

GEORGE. We would sit looking into the fire.

MURIEL. And we would see wonderful things there.

GEORGE. Then I would take out a cigarette.
(*He takes out cigarette and places it in his mouth*)

MURIEL. And I would insist on lighting it for you. (*She rises, takes matches from mantelshelf and lights his cigarette*)

MURIEL. And before I allowed you to enjoy your smoke——

GEORGE. You would kiss me.

MURIEL. Like that. (*She kisses him, then sits on his knee with an arm round his neck. The light from the fire burns low and they are barely discernible by the audience*)

GEORGE. And do you recollect when——

(*The Curtain falls in time to prevent completion of speech*)

THE COSHER

A Play in One Act

1914

CHARACTERS

JIM SMITH

DICK

MRS. MARTIN

FANNY

SCENE: *Interior of a mean tenement at Limehouse, London. Door L. Broken-down bed R. C. Chairs and table L. C. Dingy oil-lamp on table, alight.*

THE COSHER

(Fanny discovered on bed. She is a young woman, untidy and shabbily dressed, but not without physical attractions.)

(Enter Jim. He is a weak-looking man of about twenty-five.)

JIM. Are you asleep, Fanny?

FANNY. No. I've been expecting of you a long time. Have you prigged anything?

JIM. No, I ain't. Luck's against me to-day, Give us a kiss, Fanny. *(Approaching her)*

FANNY. *(Rising and facing him)* Have you got any money?

JIM. Not a stiver. I ain't had any luck, I tell you.

FANNY. Then keep your paws off me.

JIM. 'Tain't my fault, I'm no good at pinching things. I've been trying to get a job—somewhere where I could work honest.

FANNY. Dry up with that Bible Class stuff. Do you mean to tell me you've been wasting all the day looking for a job?

JIM. Not all the day. I was a keeping my eye open for something to prig, but there was always a cop around and, blime me, I was afraid of being nabbed—then I'd be sent away from you, and I couldn't stand that.

FANNY. Garn, a lot of use you are to a girl. I wish you was nabbed.

JIM. Don't say that, Fanny. I loves you.

FANNY. Then why don't you get some hoof? The other blokes as I lived with looked after me proper, they did.

JIM. God-damn 'em.

FANNY. Why in hell I took up with you, Jim Smith, blowed if I know.

JIM. I reckon you took up with me 'cos I'd a bit of money in my pocket when you first met me. Now that's gone, you want me to go too.

FANNY. No, I don't. I like you better than the others. I do straight, Jim, seeing as you don't knock me about like they did. But I don't want you to be afraid and ashamed of priggging. How do you think we're going to live, if you don't get no money somehow?

JIM. I tell you, I'll get a job soon, then it'll be all right.

FANNY. That's what you're always a saying, and a fat chance you got of getting a regular job.

JIM. I had one once.

FANNY. Yes, carman, fifteen bob a week, and you got the sack and won't be took on anywhere's else without a character.

JIM. Well, anyhow, I ain't no good as a thief.

FANNY. You ain't no good as anything.

JIM. That's it, go for me.

FANNY. Can't you get some more splosh out of your blooming brother?

JIM. How can I, when I don't know where he is? Besides, he ain't always got money. Soon as he gets on shore he spends it. Booze and girls, them's his hobbies.

FANNY. You got some out of him before.

JIM. Yes, he was awful good to me, my brother was. He give me a couple of quid 'cos I was out o' work, then I meets you and your old mother, and between you, you soon get rid of it for me.

FANNY. Well, you've had something for it, ain't you?

JIM. Yes, from you; but the old woman, I don't see why she should have my money to buy herself gin with. I don't want her here with us, either—see?

FANNY. Don't you say nothing against my mother.

JIM. I ain't; I only said as——

FANNY. You are—just you shut up about her; she's my mother, and whoever has me has to have her.

(Mrs. Martin heard off L. singing "Home Sweet Home" in a maudlin voice)

JIM. Here she is. Damn her!

(Enter Mrs. Martin, a draggled, unkempt, prematurely old woman. It is very apparent she has been drinking, although she has control of her senses)

MRS. MARTIN. Hullo, Dearies. How are the little love-birds in their nest? *(Singing)* No matter how lowly, there's no place like Home.

FANNY. Shut up!

MRS. MARTIN. There's a nice way to talk to your own mother, what is your own flesh and blood. Shame on you, Fanny Martin, shame on you!

JIM. You're drunk again, you old devil!

MRS. MARTIN. I'm not a devil. I'm Fanny's mother. Fanny's an angel. I'm her mother, the mother of an angel, so I must be an archangel. *(Throws herself on to the bed)*

FANNY. Who's been treating of you?

MRS. MARTIN. Treating of me?

FANNY. Yes, who gave you the booze?

MRS. MARTIN. Who do you think?

FANNY. Dunno.

MRS. MARTIN. Polly Brown. She's a good old sort, is Polly. She's a buying drinks for every one down at the Red Lion. She and her man had a good cosh to-day.

JIM. A cosh?

(Fanny sits on table)

MRS. MARTIN. They got four pound, ten—to say nothing of a watch and chain and etcetras.

JIM. What! have they been a robbing of some one?

MRS. MARTIN. Put it like that, if you like, my innocent. You ain't robbed any one, have you? Oh, dear, no, 'tain't likely.

JIM. I didn't until I took up with Fanny.

MRS. MARTIN. And nice easy clicks they've been, too, a nicking things outside a shop when the cove wasn't looking; why, a kid could do that. Why don't you do a click as would make Fanny proud of you?

JIM. Don't you shove in your spoke; what's me and Fanny got to do with you?

MRS. MARTIN. She's my girl and it's my duty to see as she's treated properly. A nice way you're treating of her. What you does for her, I dunno.

What she sees in you, I dunno. Why she sticks to you, I dunno—she ain't got nothing much out of you.

JIM. I'll get a job soon.

MRS. MARTIN. You think you will; you ain't the only one as has thought that. And what are you going to do till you get a job—going to starve, ain't you; going to let her starve and going to let me starve?

JIM. No, I ain't.

MRS. MARTIN. What are you going to do, then?

JIM. I'm going to prig something when I get the chance.

MRS. MARTIN. When you get a chance. God love a duck, when do you think that'll be?

JIM. I dunno.

MRS. MARTIN. Why don't you make the chance, same as any decent bloke would?

JIM. What can I do?

MRS. MARTIN. What can you do? My eye, you're a innocent, you are! You ought to have golden wings, you ought, and be playing a golden harp.

FANNY. Shut up, mother. Don't you make fun of Jim; he's all right, he is.

MRS. MARTIN. (*Rising*) That's it, turn round on your mother, her as has reared you and brought you up in the path you should go.

FANNY. Jim and me can get on all right, don't you fret.

MRS. MARTIN. Same as Polly Brown and her man.

FANNY. (*Rising*) What they can do, we can do. (*Putting on hat and shawl*) Jim, I'm a going out.

JIM. Where you going?

FANNY. I'm going to find a bloke.

MRS. MARTIN. That's right, my dear; spoken like the child of your mother.

JIM. What do you mean?

FANNY. What I says. I'm going to find a bloke.

JIM. You're giving me the chuck?

FANNY. Course not. I'm going to bring some spondulicks to you.

JIM. You're carrying on with other fellows. I ain't going to have it, though. I ain't that sort.

MRS. MARTIN. Go down near the docks, dearie, get hold of a sailor boy, one as has had no time to spend his money.

JIM. Blast you, you old hag.

MRS. MARTIN. Blast yourself, a trying to spoil my girl's prospects.

FANNY. I'm going. I'll get a bloke and bring him back here.

JIM. God's truth, Fanny, do you mean it?

FANNY. Keep your hair on. I ain't going to have no truck with him. I'll bring him back, you keep out of the way, then when I puts out the light, come in and cosh him.

JIM. Cosh him?

FANNY. Biff him on the head, and then we gets all he has on him. Clear out of the way when I come back, or he might suspect something. If I've got any one with me, I'll sing a bit downstairs, so that you'll know. (*Exit Fanny*)

JIM. 'Ere, Fanny, I ain't——

MRS. MARTIN. (*Catching hold of Jim, who is starting after Fanny*) Don't be a damn fool, Jimmy——

JIM. Leave me alone, curse you. It's all along of you that Fanny's gone off.

MRS. MARTIN. If she had always a listened to me, she'd a done much better for herself, too, that she would. She's wasting of herself on you, that's what she is. Pity you don't take yourself off.

JIM. I know I ain't no use, but I love her too much to leave her.

MRS. MARTIN. I suppose you think she loves you.

JIM. Sometimes I think she do and sometimes I think she don't.

MRS. MARTIN. Well, she loves her old mother best of all, let me tell you that. (*Laughs*)

JIM. I wish to God I'd never seen her. You've made a thief of me, between you, and now——

MRS. MARTIN. And now she's going to give you a chance to make some coin—some for her, some for you and some for me.

JIM. I won't do it.

MRS. MARTIN. Oh, yes, you will, just as a sign of affection for my lovely daughter.

JIM. You old cat!

MRS. MARTIN. My, what a lot of fancy names you have got for me, to be sure, me as is your best friend. Look here, my lad, if you don't down this here josser she gets hold of, what do you think is going to happen? What's the bloke coming here for—eh?

JIM. Blime me if he touches her, I'll kill him.

MRS. MARTIN. That's right, dearie, now you're talking.

JIM. But she don't mean it, she ain't gone after any one.

MRS. MARTIN. (*Insinuatingly*) She'll be back soon and you may bet your life she'll have a new found gentleman friend with her.

JIM. How do you know? Maybe it's only her talk.

MRS. MARTIN. Many's the time she's done it afore. When she and Bill Harvey was together it were quite a business with them. Bill was a bit of a bruiser and knocked the men out fair.

JIM. My brother was right. He said all women was hell.

MRS. MARTIN. Oh, did he? .

JIM. He ought to know, too, he spends all his money on 'em. Says he, "Keep your eyes open when you go with 'em—pay 'em for what you has and for the Lord's sake don't get tied up to one."

MRS. MARTIN. Pity you didn't mind what your brother said, you dirty funk.

JIM. I ain't a funk.

MRS. MARTIN. You are, to let another bloke go with Fanny.

JIM. I ain't a going to let him. She belongs to me and I'm a going to keep her—See?

MRS. MARTIN. That's right, that's right. When she brings him along—cosh him.

JIM. I will too.

MRS. MARTIN. Fanny'll be proud of you and I'll be proud of you. There's a cosh stick as Fanny has got hid outside. I'll show you how to use it; you bangs the cove behind the head with the knob part and then, bless your heart, he don't know no more until he wakes up and finds some kind friends have borrowed all his valuables.

JIM. Serve him blooming well right.

MRS. MARTIN. But you has to be careful. If you hits him on top of the head and hard you might send him to kingdom come and that would be awkward for you if the cops got to know; it would be a case of swinging for you then.

JIM. I don't care where I hits him, if he touches Fanny.

MRS. MARTIN. You must be careful, I tell you. Don't worry yourself about Fanny. She won't let him go too far. (*Fanny heard singing outside*)

JIM. That's her.

MRS. MARTIN. She's got her man. Clear out; he mustn't see you. Go on, off you get. Hide somewheres; I'll come soon and give you the cosh stick. (*Pushes him off L. Mrs. Martin smooths out bedclothes and makes a pretence of arranging room in order*)

(*Enter Fanny and Dick. He is dressed in sailor costume and considerably the worse for drink*)

MRS. MARTIN. Oh, there you are, Mrs. Burton.

I wasn't expecting of you in. I've just been tidying up your room a bit.

DICK. Who's the old girl?

FANNY. That—that's Mrs. Dawson, my landlady.

MRS. MARTIN. Pleased to know you, Sir. You're Mr. Burton, ain't you, Mrs. Burton's long-lost husband of whom she's always a talking?

DICK. Eh—Oh, yes—I'm him.

MRS. MARTIN. I knew it.

FANNY. You can hook it, Mrs. Dawson.

DICK. Yes, skedaddle, old girl, can't you?

MRS. MARTIN. You want to be left alone, not having seen each other for so long.

FANNY. You've hit it.

MRS. MARTIN. Ahem! You owes me something for the rent, Mrs. Burton, perhaps your dear husband, now he's come back, will pay it for you.

DICK. You ain't going to get any money out of me. I've got no dealings with you.

MRS. MARTIN. Then you can't stay in this here room.

DICK. (*To Fanny*) What's this you've brought me to?

FANNY. (*To Dick*) Give her a bob, she'll

sling her hook all right then.

MRS. MARTIN. I must stand for my rights, dearies. If you can just give me a little now, so as I knows you're honest people.

DICK. (*Places his hand inside his jumper and produces coin*) Here—take this shilling and get.

MRS. MARTIN. Oh, thank you, Sir, you're a real gent, you are, a real gent and no mistake. I'm a going. (*With a leer*) So long, dearies. Hope you enjoy yourselves. (*Exit Mrs. Martin*)

DICK. Damn the old woman. Does she get money from every one as comes here with you?

FANNY. Most always; but let me tell you, I don't bring many blokes here. I ain't regularly on the streets.

DICK. I didn't reckon on paying more than you said. I'll take the bob out of that.

FANNY. Now don't be mean now; a fine looking chap like you oughtn't to be stingy; besides, you ain't so hard up as that, are you?

DICK. No, I ain't hard up. I got plenty, all right. You're a pretty enough girl. I'll give you what I said I would. Here, catch hold. (*Taking money from a pouch which is inside his jumper and giving it to her*)

FANNY. (*Placing money in top of her stocking*) Thanks; I knew you was the right sort, I did. Just the bloke I was a looking for.

DICK. You're a bit of all right, you are.

FANNY. Think so? (*Taking off hat and shawl*)

DICK. I should say so. Here, give us a kiss to start on.

FANNY. Wait a bit, can't you? don't be in such a hurry. (*Letting down her hair*)

DICK. Buck up, I can't wait much longer.

FANNY. I ain't a going to undress in front of you. I'll put the light out—see?

DICK. What?

FANNY. It's just as good in the dark, ain't it?

DICK. All right. (*Fanny blows out lamp. Stage dark*)

FANNY. I shan't be long now.

DICK. Where are you, my girl?

FANNY. Over here; keep your hair on, now; don't be in such a hurry.

DICK. I can't find you, where are you?

FANNY. Here, I tells you. (*Fanny seizes him and pushes him back towards door L.*)

DICK. What the devil are you doing? What's your little game?

(*Enter Jim*)

FANNY. Cosh him, Jim, cosh him.

DICK. (*Shouting*) Help! Help!

(*Jim knocks Dick on the head with stick. Dick falls to the ground with his face forward*)

FANNY. He's down; quiet as a mouse. Get a light, Jim. (*Jim goes up stage and lights lamp*)

(*Enter Mrs. Martin*)

MRS. MARTIN. Is it all over? Have you put the little sailor boy to sleep?

FANNY. Yes, Jim coshed him good.

MRS. MARTIN. Where's his money?

FANNY. Turn him over. He's got a bag round his chest.

MRS. MARTIN. (*Advancing to body*) Show a light, can't you?

(*Jim comes down, holding lamp, but is too overcome to look in the direction of the body*)

MRS. MARTIN. (*Searching Dick*) Ha, ha! Here it is. (*Pulling out bag with money in it and holding it up*)

FANNY. I told you so.

MRS. MARTIN. (*Eagerly counting the money*) One, two, three, four, five, six—six pound. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—eight bob. Six pound eight, my dear, think of that. Money for you and money for Jim and money for me. (*Laughs*) Ha, ha!

FANNY. Stow it, mother. (*Beside the body*)
He ain't breathing. Blime me, I believe he's dead.

MRS. MARTIN. Feel his heart, dearie, feel his heart.

FANNY. It ain't moving. He's done for, he is.
He's a gone one.

MRS. MARTIN. Let's have a look. (*Examining the body*) Show a light, can't you, Jim?

(*Jim comes nearer with the light. He sees the body for the first time, and stands regarding it, horror-struck*)

MRS. MARTIN. Yes, he's a dead 'un, right enough.

JIM. (*Realizing what he has done*) God—God—
—It's my brother—my brother Dick, and I've killed him.

(*Curtain*)

BEAUTY VERSUS THE BEAST

A Duologue

1912

CHARACTERS

BASIL NORTON

BARBARA WEST

SCENE: *Room in Basil's Chambers. Door L. Window R. Fireplace C. Table, chairs, etc. Comfortably furnished in bachelor fashion. Photographs on mantelshelf.*

BEAUTY VERSUS THE BEAST

(Basil discovered seated, reading a letter. He is a smart, good-looking, middle-aged man of somewhat blasé appearance. He has on dressing-gown, and is smoking. He rises, glances at clock on mantelshelf and compares his watch with it. Stands by the mantelshelf and again reads the letter, evidently pleased but perplexed at the contents. Bell heard off. He hastily puts pipe down and changes his dressing-gown for lounge coat. He goes to door L., opens it and stands watching off at some one being shown in at the front door; then speaks, holding the door open)

BASIL. Will you please come in here?

(Enter Barbara, slowly and looking hesitatingly at him. She is a pretty blonde of about twenty)

BARBARA. You—are Mr. Norton, are you not?

BASIL. Yes, I'm Basil Norton, at your service, my dear lady. Won't you sit down?

BARBARA. *(Sits)* Thank you. *(Basil waits for her to speak, but she says nothing)*

BASIL. May I ask if you are *(Referring to letter)*—"W. B."?

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BARBARA. Yes, I am the writer of that letter.

BASIL. You do me a great honour in writing to me.

BARBARA. Honour?

BASIL. It has given me an additional interest in life. A letter from an unknown lady adds a fillip to a jaded imagination.

BARBARA. You guessed, then, that I was a woman?

BASIL. Dear lady, your communication breathes femininity in every sentence. (*Reading letter*) "Will you pardon the liberty I am taking? I intend calling on you to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, when I hope you will be in. I have something to discuss with you, which to me is very serious and important. Please listen to me. W. B." In answer to this note, may I say that it is now eleven o'clock, I am here and only too willing to listen to anything you may have to tell me?

BARBARA. Thank you.

BASIL. I am prepared to discuss any serious and important subject you care to select, from Botany to—Preparedness, although I know nothing of the former and the latter I am only conversant with through the headlines of my daily paper (*Sits*)—a Republican one.

BARBARA. I hope I have not been indiscreet in coming here.

BASIL. Indiscreet! You have made this day one of the most delightful of my life. (*He draws his chair nearer to Barbara*)

BARBARA. You must think it strange that a girl whom you have never spoken to before should visit you in this manner.

BASIL. Strange? Say rather a romance and romance is only strange when we see it in cold print.

BARBARA. Oh—but my visit is anything but a romance.

BASIL. To me it is quite a romance. A twentieth century edition of "Beauty and the Beast." I am the ugly, repulsive beast and you are the radiant beauty.

BARBARA. Please do not pay me compliments. I want to talk to you very seriously.

BASIL. I'm all attention, my dear Miss—Miss—— (*As she does not give her name, he glances at the letter again*) My dear Miss W. B.

BARBARA. I have come to ask you to do a good action.

BASIL. A good action? None of my friends or enemies have ever yet accused me of being capable of such a thing.

BARBARA. We are all capable of doing good.

BASIL. But so few of us want to. It gives one a bad name to be labelled as the man who is trying to do good.

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BARBARA. I want to ask you to do something that will bring happiness to others.

BASIL. What is it—a donation to a charity? I don't believe in Charities; they help to make poverty attractive to the idle—but when Beauty demands, I am powerless.

BARBARA. No, no! It is something that concerns me nearer. I am here—because—Oh, it's so hard for me to tell you.

BASIL. Then don't try. (*He rises and goes down on one knee*) On my bended knee I offer thanks to the circumstances, whatever they are, that brought you to the lair of the Beast.

BARBARA. Oh, but you don't understand. I must explain.

BASIL. Please don't. When explanations begin, confidences cease.

BARBARA. What I am going to ask of you concerns another.

BASIL. Oh! Then this meeting is not a delicious secret between us two?

BARBARA. Indeed, I want nobody to know of my calling on you.

BASIL. Nobody shall. (*Bowing to her*) When Beauty comes to the Beast, the Beast will remain silent to the outside world regarding the exquisite visitation he has received.

BARBARA. Please don't make fun of me.

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BASIL. Believe me, I'm not. Making fun is a most serious business, and I always did hate being serious.

BARBARA. You make it so difficult for me to approach you.

BASIL. Let me approach you, then. (*He brings his chair closer to hers*) May I ask who the other is of whom you spoke?

BARBARA. He is some one very dear to me.

BASIL. (*With a slight tone of disappointment*) Yes?

BARBARA. Some one who is all I have in the world to care for, besides my mother.

BASIL. Lucky mortal. Is it indiscreet to ask the name of this favoured being?

BARBARA. His name is Norman West.

BASIL. (*Concealing rather a bitter laugh*) Young West! You love him? (*Rises*)

BARBARA. Yes, and it's because I do, that I'm here now.

BASIL. You say you love Norman West and for this reason you visit me here?

BARBARA. Yes.

BASIL. Then the Beast has reluctantly to confess to the Beauty—that he does not understand.

BARBARA. You are his friend, are you not? (*Rising and going to him*)

BASIL. I think I've smoked a sufficient number of his cagarettes to be called so.

BARBARA. You have great influence over him.

BASIL. I don't know about that. I've been a trifle useful to West.

BARBARA. You think you have helped him?

BASIL. Well, I've helped to polish him. He was quite a rough diamond at one time.

BARBARA. He is very different from what he was.

BASIL. Yes, when I first knew him, he was the model Sunday School youth. I've shown him round a bit—made him feel his feet. I think I've improved him a little.

BARBARA. (*Slowly crossing to chair and sitting*) Improved?

BASIL. Yes, an innocent lambkin may be a very picturesque object in a story book, but in real life it's a positive blot on the landscape. Young West, when I first met him, was walking through the world with his eyes shut. For the past twelve months I've been endeavouring to open them, and I think I've been fairly successful. I first had to elevate his eyebrows—elevate them with surprise—surprise at the many good things in the world he had not noticed before. Then he was able to peer at what the parsons called the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and now that his eyes are

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opening wide, he is beginning to realise to the full the beauty of all the things he has missed.

BARBARA. I wonder if it is you or your talk that is wicked?

BASIL. I beg of you not to think that I'm wicked—that is unless you have a preference for wicked men; then I'm as wicked as you please.

BARBARA. I don't like wicked men.

BASIL. I don't, either. A man who is wholly wicked must be nearly as tedious as a man who is wholly good. Thank goodness, the majority of us seek shelter in the half-way house.

BARBARA. Why do you joke about such serious things?

BASIL. Because it's a far better policy to laugh at serious things than to take laughable things seriously.

BARBARA. It's not nice of you to keep making fun of me.

BASIL. (*Going to her and sitting on footstool on the ground by her chair*) Forgive the beast; he is penitent. He lies at your foot. Smile at him and, Hey—Presto, he will become Prince Charming.

BARBARA. Please forgive what I'm going to say.

BASIL. Say anything you please.

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BARBARA. (*With an effort*) I wanted to tell you that your friendship for Norman is doing him no good.

BASIL. Which means that you don't approve of the improvement I flattered myself I had made in him.

BARBARA. How could I approve? He is quite a different boy. His nature is so easily influenced. I don't think you're really a bad man, but Norman is weak and easily led. You don't realise the harm you are doing him.

BASIL. Harm? Is it possible that the small share of worldly wisdom I have instilled in Norman could do him harm? It is necessary for us all to know the world in which we live.

BARBARA. There was a person once who offered to lay all of the world at the feet of another. He was called by an ugly name.

BASIL. By jove, that's one to you. Tell Norman that, and he'll be saying, "Get behind me, Satan," when next we meet.

BARBARA. (*Hastily*) Oh, I didn't mean that you were—Oh, indeed I didn't. I'm sure you're much better than he was.

BASIL. (*Dryly*) Thank you.

BARBARA. (*Rises*) I understand Norman. He is different from you. If he lives in the world like you, it will do harm to him.

BASIL. (*Rising and following her*) My dear lady, I——

BARBARA. (*Turning and pleading to him*) Please relax the influence you have over him. You don't know what it means to those near to him. Before he met you, he was interested in his future. He worked hard for his examinations. He was happy and cheerful and a comfort to those at home. Now he is always seeking pleasure; on the rare occasions when he is at home, he is cynical and discontented. He is an only son; all his mother's thoughts are centred in him, but she rarely sees him now. He is forever in your company.

BASIL. There comes a day when the bird leaves its nest.

BARBARA. He even tries to say clever things like you. It isn't a good sign when a man invents smart phrases to condone his doings.

BASIL. I appear to be in your bad books. From what you've said, I shouldn't be very much surprised to hear that you disliked me somewhat.

BARBARA. Oh, no, I—it's the influence you have over Norman that I dislike.

BASIL. Beauty did not dislike the Beast—only his skin. You do not dislike me, but the influence that you credit me with having.

BARBARA. Yes. Please do not be angry because I tell you this. I do it for Norman's sake.

BASIL. Angry? Angry, because a girl whom I can see to be good and pure disapproves of my ways? (*Seriously*) Let me tell you something. In my heart of hearts I disapprove of my own ways. I think I should be happier were I less a man of the world. But I've been unfortunate, I've had nobody to influence me. I have drifted and drifted until I have become a—veritable—Beast.

BARBARA. Don't say that. No doubt your ways suit you well enough, but they are not suited to Norman.

BASIL. You wish me to cease to be his friend? (*Facing her*)

BARBARA. I dare not ask you that. I only ask you not to take him away from others, from his home, from his studies.

BASIL. Well, dear lady, for your sake, I promise only to see Norman West on rare occasions, and on those rare occasions not to exert unduly the influence you say I have over him.

BARBARA. (*Taking his hand and looking gratefully at him*) How kind of you! Thank you, thank you.

BASIL. It seems that, like Norman, I too can be easily influenced, although until to-day I did not know it. You see how soon I succumbed. You have conquered.

BARBARA. Not I, but your better nature won the victory.

BASIL. (*Still holding her hand*) You love Norman. Your love must be a glorious thing. It is far better for him to revel in that than in the many frothy pleasures to which I could introduce him. The only thing I ask is, that when the day arrives for him to place a gold band on this little finger, you will not altogether forget the Beast whose den you invaded for the sake of your sweetheart. (*Barbara laughs*) I'm trying to be serious now. Don't laugh. This is the first time in my life that I've been really serious.

BARBARA. (*Suppressing her laughter*) It's so funny. Norman is not going to marry me.

BASIL. You mean you're giving him up?

BARBARA. Giving him up? No.

BASIL. You're not going to marry him and you're not giving him up. You don't mean to say he's giving you up? The fool!

BARBARA. No, No!

BASIL. You have the better of me again. I don't understand.

BARBARA. Norman couldn't marry me if he wanted to. You see, he's my brother.

BASIL. Your brother?

BARBARA. Yes.

BASIL. And all the time I've been thinking that——

BARBARA. Hasn't he spoken to you of his sister Barbara?

BASIL. He certainly has, but your initials in this letter are W. B.

BARBARA. Barbara West, but with the Surname and Christian name reversed.

BASIL. (*Slowly*) Barbara—West—and I thought that you were the future Mrs. Norman West. (*Laughs*) I'm completely routed, but I'm glad. Yes, glad, because now I shall be able to ask you something I couldn't ask before

BARBARA. You want to ask *me* something?

BASIL. Yes, it's my turn now, but it's such an important question that I think I had better wait until you have a better opinion of me. Instead of influencing others, I am going to be influenced myself. You'll use that influence, won't you? It will be all for my good.

BARBARA. I am sure my influence is small.

BASIL. Believe me, it is great. Use it and you will find that, like Norman, I shall become a changed man, with this difference—my change will make me a better man.

BARBARA. You really mean this?

BASIL. I do. Before long you will have a different opinion of me. Tell me, do you think I'm very, very bad now?

BARBARA. I think that, like many another Beast, your bark is worse than your bite.

BASIL. Dare I venture to ask my question?

BARBARA. Please don't—that is—not now.

BASIL. In six months' time, then. When I have proved to you that——

BARBARA. I—I—must be going. They will miss me at home. (*Going to door and extending her hand*) Good-bye. (*They shake hands*) Thank you for your promise, but you'll come and see Norman sometimes?

BASIL. (*Eagerly*) And you, too?

BARBARA. Well, I shall always be there. Good-bye.

(*She exits L. He looks after her for a moment, then comes down. He takes out her letter, reads it again, kisses it and places it in pocket-book, which he puts gently in his pocket*)

(*Curtain*)

A MOTOR MISHAP

A Comedy in One Act

1913

CHARACTERS

GODFREY TARLETON

JACK WORTH

AGNES BRUNTON

SCENE: *The Bath High Road. It is nine o'clock of an evening in October. On the R. is a signpost which reads "5 Miles to Devizes."*

A MOTOR MISHAP

(The curtain rises on a dark stage, the scene being barely discernible. The noise of an auto approaching is heard L., then suddenly ceases. The lamps from the auto light up the L. of the stage, but the R. is in comparative darkness)

AGNES. *(Speaking off)* What is the matter? Why have you stopped the car?

GODFREY. *(Speaking off)* I haven't stopped it. It stopped itself.

AGNES. *(Off)* What's the matter with it?

GODFREY. *(Off)* I don't know.

AGNES. *(Off)* I'm going to get out. Help me down.

GODFREY. *(Off)* Yes, dear.

(They are heard to descend from the car. Enter Agnes, followed by Godfrey, L.)

AGNES. I thought you knew how to drive a car.

GODFREY. So I do, darling.

AGNES. Then why does it stop dead? What is the matter with it? Why doesn't it go on?

GODFREY. I say, I'm not to blame, you know, for the vagaries of an automobile.

AGNES. You could have seen that everything was all right before we set out.

GODFREY. They are supposed to do that at the garage.

AGNES. On an occasion like this, you should have done it yourself.

GODFREY. Yes, dear, but I don't know how.

AGNES. You don't know how? You said just now that you knew how to drive a car.

GODFREY. Yes, but I don't know anything about overhauling. It wasn't part of the course.

AGNES. The course?

GODFREY. Yes, I had a ten-guinea course at a motoring school—twelve lessons in all.

AGNES. Where are we?

GODFREY. I don't know, dear.

AGNES. What are we going to do?

GODFREY. I don't know, darling.

AGNES. What a resourceful man you are. For goodness' sake, do something. We can't stay here all night.

GODFREY. No, of course not, darling.

AGNES. And don't keep calling me darling.

GODFREY. Not if you don't wish it.

AGNES. And don't stand there doing nothing. Get us out of this fix. Oh, if only my husband were here, he would know what to do.

GODFREY. I call that unkind, Agnes.

AGNES. What?

GODFREY. To speak so of your husband on such a momentous occasion as this. Remember we are eloping.

AGNES. Am I likely to forget it when the car breaks down at midnight and we are miles from anywhere?

GODFREY. It isn't midnight. It hasn't gone ten yet.

AGNES. How perverse you are! If you really love me as you say you do, you wouldn't contradict me.

GODFREY. I beg your pardon, dearest.

AGNES. Can't we find out where we are?

GODFREY. We'll ask the first person who passes how far we are from a hotel.

AGNES. Supposing nobody passes all night—what are we going to do then? Stay here?

GODFREY. I'll walk on and see if I can find an

inn or a cottage.

AGNES. What! And leave me all alone? How can you suggest such a thing, Godfrey? You know my nerves would never stand it.

GODFREY. Let us go together.

AGNES. I couldn't walk a step. I'm too exhausted. Do think of something sensible.

GODFREY. Yes, dear.

AGNES. Couldn't you shout out for help?

GODFREY. There may be nobody to hear.

AGNES. Keep it up till somebody does.

GODFREY. Well, I'll try. Help! (*He gives vent to a small shrill shout*)

AGNES. That's not nearly loud enough.

GODFREY. (*Shouting again*) Help!

AGNES. Louder!

GODFREY. (*With an effort*) Help! Help!! Help!!! (*At the last shout his voice cracks*)

AGNES. That's enough for the present. What is that over there? (*Pointing R.*)

GODFREY. It is something white.

AGNES. Is it alive?

GODFREY. No, no!

AGNES. (*Shrinking back behind Godfrey*) It is pointing at us. It knows that I have left my husband. It is denouncing me. Oh, Oh, why did I do it? Why did I do it?

GODFREY. (*Peering intently at the object*) It's all right. There is no need to be frightened. It is only a signpost.

AGNES. Only a signpost?

GODFREY. That's all.

AGNES. Then we can find out where we are.

GODFREY. By Jove! So we can. (*They advance towards the signpost R.*)

AGNES. Let's see what it says.

GODFREY. I wish we could see.—What does it say? "Five miles to—to——" I know, I'll strike a match, then we shall be able to see. (*He fumbles with matches, eventually strikes one, burning his finger at the same time. He utters an exclamation and lets the box of matches fall*)

AGNES. What's the matter?

GODFREY. I've burnt my fingers. (*Searching on ground for matches*)

AGNES. How clumsy you are! Horace never burns his fingers when he lights a match.

GODFREY. It's most unfair to compare me with your husband under the circumstances. He doesn't

elope with married women—he doesn't——

AGNES. Yes, there are quite a number of things he doesn't do. He has his business to look after; that occupies all his time.

GODFREY. Poor prosaic soul.

AGNES. Godfrey, how dare you speak slightly of him!

GODFREY. I beg your pardon, dearest.

AGNES. Haven't you found the matches yet?

GODFREY. No.

AGNES. I suppose I shall have to look too.
(*They both search on the ground for the matches*)

GODFREY. Where are they? They must be somewhere.

AGNES. And this is finding my affinity.

GODFREY. I've got them. Now we shall be able to read the sign. (*He lights match and holds it up, but the sign is too high for them to read*)

AGNES. Hold the match higher.

GODFREY. (*Standing on tip-toe*) That's as high as I can.

AGNES. What a nuisance—we can't read it. You'll have to climb up the post.

GODFREY. Yes, dear, I'll try if you wish it, but I——

AGNES. You must. How else are we to find out where we are?

GODFREY. (*Triumphantly*) I've got it.

AGNES. What?

GODFREY. It's the very thing.

AGNES. What's the very thing?

GODFREY. Why, one of the motor lamps.

AGNES. Of course. How stupid you are. Why didn't you think of it before?

GODFREY. I'll fetch one of them. We'll soon know what it says up there. (*Exits quickly L.*)

AGNES. (*Calling after him*) Be quick.

(*In moving, Agnes stumbles over Jack Worth, who is asleep near the signpost. He utters a drowsy exclamation*)

AGNES. (*Running away*) Oh! Oh! Godfrey!

GODFREY. (*Off stage*) Yes, dear, what is it? (*Enters L. with motor lamp*)

AGNES. There's something alive over there. It came near me and clutched hold of me.

GODFREY. Where is it?

AGNES. (*Pointing*) There.

GODFREY. (*Speaking in Jack's direction*) How dare you molest this lady?

(Godfrey turns the lamp towards Jack, who is seen awakening from sleep. Jack Worth is dressed in old clothes and has an unkempt beard, yet a certain air of refinement and some degree of cleanliness proclaim him to be other than the ordinary tramp)

AGNES. It's one of those horrid tramps. What a start he gave me.

(Jack rises and faces Godfrey and Agnes)

JACK. Excuse me, do you mind turning that lamp in another direction? The light is so powerful it is hurting my eyes.

GODFREY. Cheek! *(Steps back)*

JACK. Thank you. I am exceedingly obliged.

GODFREY. What do you mean by frightening this lady?

JACK. If I have frightened her, I humbly beg her pardon—such was not my intention, Mr. Tarleton.

GODFREY. You know me?

JACK. I recognised you the moment you spoke.

GODFREY. Who are you? You are not what you seem; you are no common tramp.

JACK. Indeed I am, inasmuch as at present I have no visible means of sustenance.

GODFREY. I know your voice. Who are you?

JACK. I was once a friend of yours.

GODFREY. A friend of mine. (*He turns the lamp in his direction, takes a good look at him, then recognises him*) Mad Jack!

JACK. Jack Worth, at your service. (*Bows*)
(*Godfrey holds the lamp nearer to him*)

JACK. Please remember, there are few things I cannot face but that lamp is one of them. Let me place it down for you.

(*Jack takes the lamp from Godfrey and places it on one of the supports of the signpost in such a position that it, with the light off L., now fully illumines the stage.*)

AGNES. (*To Godfrey*) You know him, Godfrey?

GODFREY. Yes, there's no need to be afraid.

AGNES. I'm not.

JACK. (*Returning to them*) This is indeed a pleasure, meeting you again, Godfrey, even though you did snatch me somewhat rudely from Dream-land.

GODFREY. What are you doing here, Jack, and in that rig-out?

JACK. Before I give any details of my biography, won't you introduce me to your wife?

GODFREY. Er—yes. My dear, this is Mr. Worth,

an old college chum of mine.

JACK. (*Bowing*) Delighted to make your acquaintance.

AGNES. Yes, but I'm not his wife.

GODFREY. Agnes!

JACK. Please pardon my mistake.

AGNES. I am eloping with him, though.

GODFREY. Agnes, don't be so indiscreet. What will Mr. Worth think?

AGNES. Mr. Worth will understand. He is a man of the world, despite his appearance.

GODFREY. (*Changing the conversation hurriedly*) Yes, why this appearance?

JACK. It's very easy to explain. I am gifted with expensive tastes,—at any rate, moderately expensive tastes.

GODFREY. Is that why you sleep on the high road and wear those clothes?

JACK. Precisely.

GODFREY. You always were a puzzle, Jack.

JACK. It's simple enough. I have an annual income of £800, the capital of which is entailed. This amount is not nearly sufficient to supply my wants all the year round. It lasts me, as a rule, some four or five months, then for the remainder

of the year I live on nothing.

GODFREY. Nothing—I don't see how you can.

JACK. That is figuratively speaking, nothing. I become a tramp, a knight of the road, and I exist in much the same fashion as the gentlemen of that fraternity do.

AGNES. Why don't you allow your income to cover the whole of the year? Many people live well on less.

JACK. At college I was given the sobriquet of "Mad Jack." Why, I don't know, unless it was that I had my own reasons for doing things. My reason for regulating my finances so, is that I can be happy on plenty and I can be happy on nothing, but never, never on a little. My present arrangement allows me to be happy all the year round. If I eked my money out to last the whole twelve months, I should be miserable for exactly the same period.

GODFREY. Couldn't you do work of some kind?

JACK. I doubt it, and why should I try? I'm quite contented with things as they are.

AGNES. But you can't enjoy going about the country like this.

JACK. Certainly I can.

AGNES. How strange!

JACK. Not at all. I enjoy a freedom which has

a charm of its own. Then, too, the contrast between this and a life of plenty gives light and shade to my life. Mine is not the ordinary drab existence of a man with expensive habits living on £800 a year at so much per month.

AGNES. What a philosopher you are, Mr. Worth.

JACK. Every one who thinks is a philosopher.

AGNES. I think a great deal, but I don't get the same amount of happiness from my surroundings as you do.

JACK. Possibly you don't aim at happiness. It is my direct target, notwithstanding the fact that I am called "Mad Jack."

AGNES. What other aim could I have but happiness?

JACK. Perhaps—romance.

AGNES. Romance?

JACK. Yes, romance—an artificial creation by man.

AGNES. But romance is beautiful.

JACK. So are artificial creations—sometimes.

AGNES. What makes you say that I aim at romance?

JACK. The night air, the Bath Road, the motor car, and the presence of Godfrey Tarleton.

GODFREY. Look here, Jack, you're talking a lot of rot, the same as you always did. Can you tell us where we are?

JACK. Yes, it's five miles to Devizes and twenty-five to Bath.

GODFREY. Thanks. If we can get to Devizes, we'll stay there the night.

JACK. Why the doubt?

GODFREY. There's something the matter with the car. It stopped dead a short time ago. Perhaps it's all right now. I'll have a go and see if I can start the thing. (*Crosses to entrance L.*)

AGNES. At last you're going to do something.

GODFREY. I'll see what I can do, but I'm not a beastly mechanic, you know. (*Exits L.*)

AGNES. The car breaking down has spoilt everything.

JACK. Not for me; but for the accident, I shouldn't have had the honour of your acquaintance.

AGNES. It has been very interesting to meet a man with your original views, Mr. Worth, still, I am beginning to wish I hadn't come.

JACK. Then there would have been no——

AGNES. No elopement.

JACK. And no romance.

AGNES. It does not seem nearly so romantic now as when it was being planned.

JACK. Romance and the present rarely coincide. In the future, maybe you will look back on this as the most eventful day of your life. It will either be a day of regrets or a day of sweet romance, according to how your marriage turns out.

AGNES. Oh, but I am already married.

JACK. Then I'll say no more. I appear to be treading on dangerous ground.

AGNES. Oh, no; Godfrey and I said we would defy the world. Naturally, after my husband has secured his divorce, we are to be married.

JACK. You think he will apply for a divorce?

AGNES. It will be very mean of him if he doesn't.

JACK. You are, of course, very much in love with Godfrey?

AGNES. I suppose so, otherwise I wouldn't have run away with him.

JACK. And he is in love with you?

AGNES. He says so.

JACK. Do you think so yourself?

AGNES. Well, he is very attentive to me.

JACK. More so than your husband?

AGNES. More than my husband is now, but not

more than he was before we were married.

JACK. And you think Godfrey's attentions will continue after you have been divorced and then married to him?

AGNES. I hope so. You see, we understand one another so well.

JACK. Umph—Do you mind my asking these questions?

AGNES. I shouldn't answer them if I did. Besides, I am not quite sure whether I have done a wise thing. I feel you can advise me.

JACK. I will do all in my power to save you and Godfrey from making the same mistake I once made in the days when I did not boast of being happy. Tell me, isn't your husband good to you?

AGNES. Oh, yes, in his way; but I see so little of him. His business occupies so much of his time. Why, this morning he went to Liverpool, and is to be away for two or three days.

JACK. Leaving his wife to the mercy of sympathetic strangers. Weren't you happy at home?

AGNES. In a sense, yes, but there was something lacking.

JACK. Romance?

AGNES. Yes.

JACK. And so you have set out in pursuit of it?

AGNES. Yes.

JACK. You are chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, dear lady.

AGNES. But I must find it somewhere.

JACK. Then find it in your home. Be content, be happy. You must dispense with romance in order to find romance.

AGNES. If I could only think so!

JACK. Your husband loves you, doesn't he?

AGNES. Oh, yes.

JACK. Is Godfrey's love so much more worthy that you give up your husband's for it?

AGNES. No.

JACK. Then why do it?

AGNES. You see, my husband loves me, but does not tell me so; now, Godfrey is always telling me he loves me.

JACK. Let your husband's actions tell you. He is working hard making money; no doubt he lavishes a deal of it on you.

AGNES. Yes, I have everything I want that money can buy.

JACK. Then don't leave the substance for the shadow; let your romance be practical, not chimerical.

AGNES. It's too late now.

JACK. Why is it? You can go back and this little escapade need only be known to us three. Say nothing yourself, rest assured that I will say nothing, and for the sake of his own dignity, Godfrey will do the same.

AGNES. If I went back, how could I manage it?

JACK. Let me take you.

AGNES. How? (*Noise heard off of Godfrey experimenting on car*)

JACK. In the car.

AGNES. It's broken.

JACK. It can be repaired.

AGNES. Yes, but——

JACK. If he hasn't done it, I'll see what I can do. I know something of motors, and should be able to put any ordinary accident to rights.

AGNES. What am I to say to Godfrey?

JACK. Leave him to me. I'll arrange matters somehow.

AGNES. What shall I do? What shall I do?

(*Enter Godfrey L. He has taken his coat off and has his shirt sleeves rolled up*)

GODFREY. I've tightened up a lot of nuts and things and experimented all ways with the car, but

it still won't go.

JACK. Perhaps I can discover what's wrong.

GODFREY. Do you know anything about autos?

JACK. A little.

GODFREY. I wish you'd see what you can do, then. It's a mystery to me what's the matter.

JACK. Well, I'll do my best. (*Exit L.*)

AGNES. Godfrey, your friend and I have had a long talk.

GODFREY. He's a weird creature, isn't he?

AGNES. He certainly has ideas.

GODFREY. But he's mad, you know. He earned that name at college and it's stuck to him ever since. He's lived a wild kind of life, too.

AGNES. Yes.

GODFREY. He was mixed up in a big scandal—some woman or other.

AGNES. What was the scandal?

GODFREY. (*Contemptuously*) She was a married woman and he ran away with her.

AGNES. Oh!

GODFREY. (*Realising what he has said*) Of course, it was a very different affair from ours—very different.

AGNES. Now I know why he spoke to me as he did.

GODFREY. What has he been saying to you?

AGNES. Nothing—a little advice, that's all. Because you elope with me, I suppose in the future your friends will know you as "Mad Godfrey."

GODFREY. Agnes!

(*Enter Jack Worth L. He is carrying Godfrey's coat*)

JACK. I think it's all right now.

GODFREY. You've mended the car?

JACK. Yes.

GODFREY. What was the matter?

JACK. The wire from the magneto was loose at the coil, so I just tightened it.

GODFREY. I remember they told me something about the magneto at the motoring school. (*Arranging his shirt sleeves*)

AGNES. The car is ready now, then?

JACK. Yes. (*Jack, unseen by Godfrey, indicates to Agnes that she is to enter the car*)

AGNES. (*Crossing*) I think I'll get in. (*Exits L.*)

JACK. (*Crossing*) I'll bring the lamp along. (*Hides Godfrey's coat behind the signpost and*

picks up motor lamp)

GODFREY. Thanks, old man, for your help; you've proved a friend in need.

JACK. (*With meaning*) I have.

GODFREY. Can't I do something for you?

JACK. No, nothing, just leave things to take care of themselves. (*Casually*) Oh—I've left your coat over there.

GODFREY. (*Going R.*) Over here?

JACK. Yes.

GODFREY. I can't see it.

JACK. It's there somewhere. (*Exits quickly L. with lamp.*)

GODFREY. I say, Jack, I can't find it, it's so confoundedly dark. Where the devil is it? Show a light, will you? Ah, I've got it. (*He picks up coat and is putting it on when noise of auto starting is heard off L.*)

GODFREY. Hullo there, wait for me.

AGNES. (*Off*) I'm very sorry, Godfrey, but we don't intend to.

GODFREY. What do you mean?

(*The lights from the motor lamps off L. move, indicating that the car is reversing its direction*)

GODFREY. I say, what are you turning round

for? Where are you going?

AGNES. (*Off*) Home. Mr Worth is taking me.

GODFREY. But you can't.

AGNES. (*Off*) I can.

GODFREY. Yes, but——

AGNES. (*Off*) No time to argue. Good-bye, Godfrey.

GODFREY. What am I to do?

AGNES. (*Off*) Devizes is only five miles off.
(*The auto is heard receding*)

GODFREY. Well, I'm—— (*Shouting after them*) I say, Worth, where's the nearest place I can get a drink?

JACK. (*A considerable way off, shouting back*) There's a Public House about two miles down the road. Look sharp. It closes at eleven. So long.

(*Godfrey stands looking off in the direction they have gone. The auto is heard disappearing*)

GODFREY. Damn! DAMN!! DAMN!!!

(*He takes out his watch, lights a match to see the time, then replaces the watch, buttons up his coat and steps out briskly in the direction of the Public House R.*)

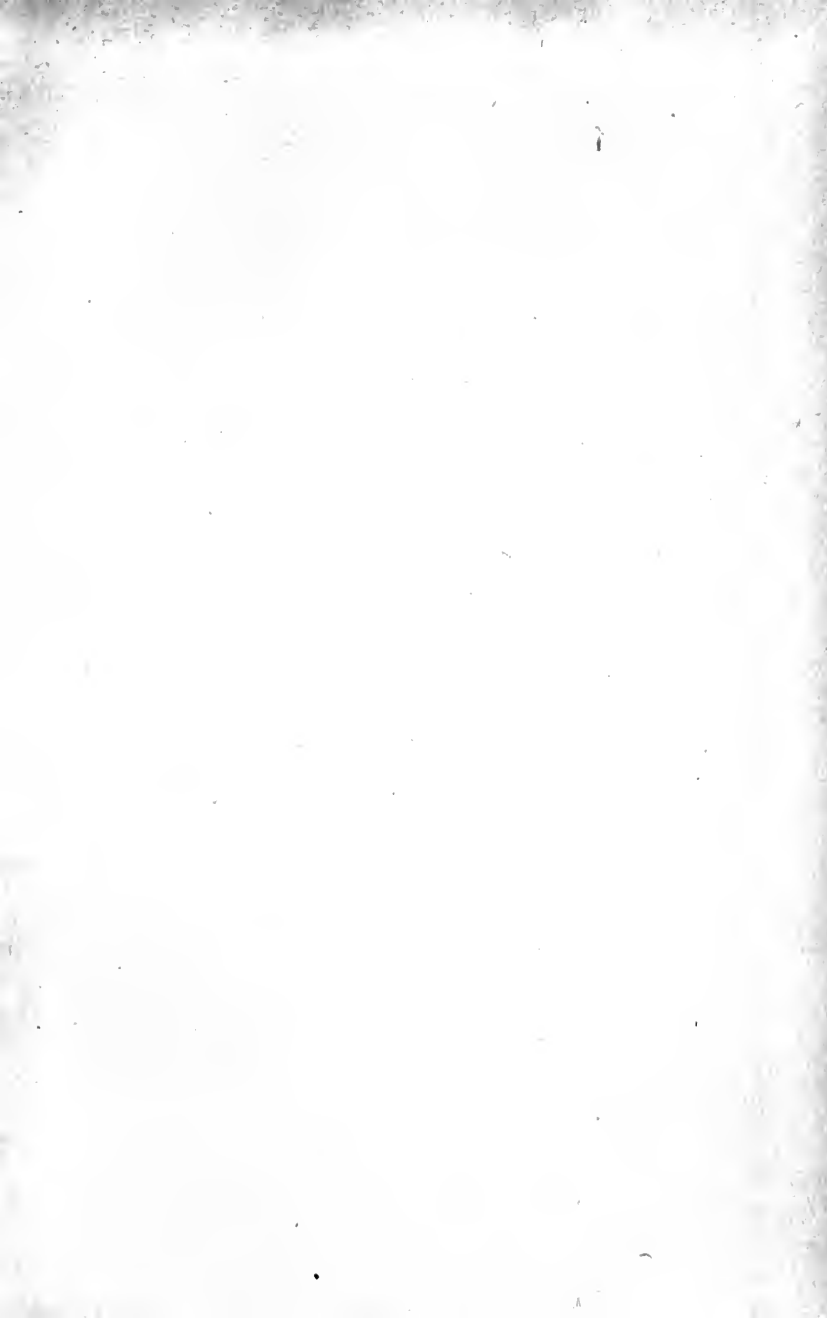
(*Curtain*)











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